

Somme American Cemetery and Memorial



The American Battle Monuments Commission

Somme American Cemetery And Memorial



LOCATION

The Somme American Cemetery and Memorial is situated $\frac{1}{2}$ mile southwest of the village of Bony (Aisne), France, approximately 120-miles/193 kilometers northeast of Paris. Bony is $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles/2.4 kilometers west of highway N-44, 13 miles/21 kilometers north of St. Quentin and 14 miles/22.5 kilometers southwest of Cambrai. The road leading to Bony leaves highway N-44, 10 miles/16 kilometers north of St. Quentin, a short distance north of the American monument near Bellicourt. The cemetery can be reached by train from the Gare du Nord station in Paris via Peronne or St. Quentin in about $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours. Taxi service to the cemetery is available from each of these stations.

The cemetery can also be reached by automobile via the Paris-Lille Bruzelles toll autoroute (A-1) to exit 13 (Valles de la Somme) then via N-29 to Vermand and Bellenglise, on D-31 to highway N-44 or Brussels Reims toll autoroute (A-26), exit 9 via highway N-44 south for $7\frac{1}{2}$ miles/12 kilometers to Bony.



Graves Area from Bronze Gate



Flagpole Base with Trench Helmets

Hotel accommodations are available at Peronne, St. Quentin and Cambrai.

HOURS

The cemetery is open daily to the public from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm except December 25 and January 1. It is open on host country holidays. When the cemetery is open to the public, a staff member is on duty in the Visitors' Building to answer questions and escort relatives to grave and memorial sites.

HISTORY

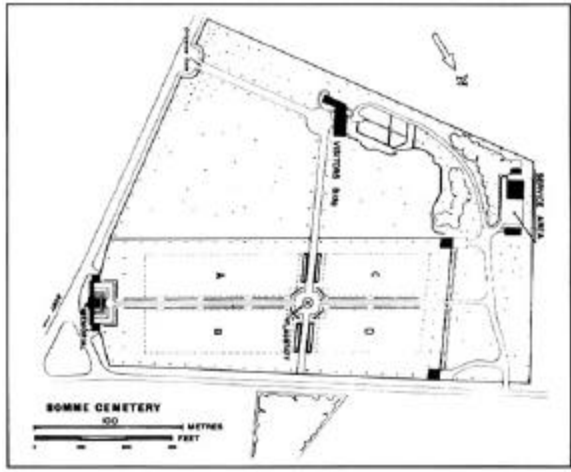
Following the United States entry into World War I, the American government promised to raise and send a trained army numbering more than one million men to France to fight on the side of the Allies. America's army at the time numbered only 200,000 men and no formed divisions existed. Beginning in May 1917, American troops began arriving in France, initially to train, not to fight.

After three years of fighting, however, the Allies needed relief. In late summer 1917, small engineer contingents were released to assist Britain's army in its sector of the Western Front northeast of Paris. By war's end, five American divisions and many separate units would fight alongside their British allies, most in the department (region) of France named for the River Somme. For the Americans who would fight there, first

combat came at Cambrai, approximately 130 miles/209 kilometers to the northeast of Paris.

The British attack at Cambrai, the first massed tank offensive in history, began on 20 November 1917 and made significant gains. By 30 November, the British attack ground to a halt due to lack of reserves, the mechanical unreliability of the primitive tanks, and a greatly reinforced German defense. About ten miles/16 kilometers to the southeast of the British salient's tip at Cambrai, lay the town of Gouzeaucourt. Here the American 11th Engineer Regiment was repairing rail lines and building a rail yard for the British.

On 30 November, the Germans mounted a major counterattack aimed at the salient's flanks and directly in front of the Americans. When the British line buckled, U.S. engineers armed themselves and joined the British defense, some fighting as infantry while others joined the counter-attack force that recaptured the town by the end of the day. The 11th Engineers suffered eighteen casualties. Earlier in September, the 11th had suffered the first U.S. battle casualties while serving in the same sector.



Layout of Cemetery

While American divisions were arriving in increasing numbers, the separate peace treaty signed by the Russia with Germany freed nearly 60 enemy divisions for use in the west. In March 1918, the Germans massed 50 divisions in the Somme Region of northern France, intending to split the British armies serving in the north from the main body of the French armies serving in the center and southern sectors of the Western Front. Attacking on 21 March, the Germans made great initial gains and plugged the front into crisis. Again, U.S. engineers supporting the British became part of the defense. Two companies of the 6th Engineer Regiment serving in the vicinity of Peronne, approximately 20 miles/32 kilometers east of Amiens, joined a mixed American-British-Canadian defense force to block the road about ten miles/16 kilometers east of Amiens. Fighting in the village of Warfusee-Abancourt on the Peronne-Amiens road during the last days of March and into early April, the Americans helped repel three German attacks and fought as infantry for eight days.

The German March offensive changed the nature of the war. American Commander-in-Chief, General John J. Pershing placed the American Expeditionary Force at the call of the new Allied Supreme Commander Marshal Ferdinand Foch. Soon arriving American divisions both trained and fought alongside the armies of Britain and France.

The U.S. 1st Division was attached to the French First Army in late April. In the early morning hours of 28 May, the 1st Division's 28th Infantry Regiment with two companies of her sister regiment, the 18th Infantry, attacked and seized the hill town of Cantigny which bulged into the Allied line. Withstanding furious counterattacks and

three full days of bombardment, the 1st Division held its gains. The attack at Cantigny was America's first division-sized offensive in World War I.

By summer, the main weight of Pershing's forces shifted to the Champagne area and further west into Lorraine to help form the American First Army, but American divisions continued to arrive on the still active Somme front which would retain an American presence until the war's end.

On the 4th of July, four companies from the U.S. 33rd Division, interspersed with units from the Australian Corps, helped to seize the village of Hamel, east of Amiens and near the 6th Engineers' battlefield. On 8 August 1918, the British began a series of major offensives that would continue until the Armistice. The U.S. 80th Division took part in these attacks from the 8th to the 18th of August near the village of Serre while farther south, the 131st Infantry drawn from the U.S. 33rd Division cleared the heights and woods overlooking the Somme River from Chipilly to Braysur-Somme.

The U.S. II Corps with the 27th and 30th Divisions was attached to the British Fourth Army in September and alternately served as a complete corps under the tactical direction of Australian and British corps. Recently arrived from combat with the British in Flanders, the II Corps was assigned to seize one of the Western Front's strongest enemy objectives: the St. Quentin tunnel complex of the Hindenburg Line.

The Corps' objective lay about 40 miles/64 kilometers east of Amiens. The Hingenburg Line consisted of multiple tiers of trenches, strong points, underground protective bays, barbed wire, and machine gun nests sited on defensively superior ground.



View of Graves Area

The American sector was about 7,500 yards wide, sited south of the Escaut River at Vendhuile running through Bony and Bellicourt to Ville Noire. Enemy trenches were

sited both on the forward and reverse slopes of a long ridge perpendicular to the American attack. Behind the ridge, the St. Quentin canal ran through a four-mile underground tunnel used by the Germans to protect their troops from bombardment.

Moving into the front lines to replace British units in late September, both divisions began limited objective attacks to secure jump-off lines for the main offensive. While some success was achieved to the flanks by both divisions, the 27th Division's attempt to clear the strongpoints dominating its attack zone was repulsed with heavy casualties in one of its regiments on 27 September. The offensive, nevertheless, proceeded two days later.

Attacking through furious fire on 29 September, the two American divisions fought side by side for two days to clear the ridge and tunnel. The 27th Division's sector which encompassed the northern half of the attack proved to be particularly vicious. In the area which includes the Somme American Cemetery and the hill to its north known as "the knoll," the 27th Division's 107th Infantry suffered 995 casualties during the first day's attack, the largest one-day American regimental loss for the entire war. The II Corps suffered over 7,500 casualties during their Hindenburg Line assault. There were nine Medal of Honor recipients.

On 6 October, after having been temporarily relieved from the front, the II Corps' two divisions were recommitted four miles/6.4 kilometers to the east of their original sector. The fighting continued with the II Corp making a further nine mile/14.6 kilometers advance. The II Corps was relieved from the line on 21 October, and with the armistice in November, the 27th and 30th Divisions never again saw battle on the Western Front. The II Corps' battles on the Somme cost over 13,500 American casualties. Its soldiers earned a total of nineteen Medals of Honor,

SITE

The 14-acre Somme American Cemetery is situated on a gentle slope typical of the open, rolling Picardy countryside. The cemetery is named after the region in which the American 1st, 27th, 30th, 33rd and 80th Divisions and the 6th and the 11th Engineers fought during the period between March 1917 and September 1918. It is the final resting-place of many of the American War Dead who fought at Cambrai, Hamel, in front of Amiens, and during the Hindenburg Offensive.

The cemetery was first established as a temporary cemetery by the American Graves Registration Service following the offensive in 1918. It was known as the American Expeditionary Forces' Somme Cemetery No. 636. After the war, the other temporary cemeteries in the area were discontinued and the military Dead of the region whose next-of-kin requested burial overseas were moved to the Somme American Cemetery for permanent interment. Post-war administration of the cemetery passed to the American Battle Monuments Commission in 1934. The Commission landscaped the grounds and constructed the memorial chapel and other permanent buildings. The cemetery was dedicated on 30 May 1937.

ARCHITECTS

Architect for the memorial chapel and other architectural features was George Howe of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

GENERAL LAYOUT

The formal entrance, with its ornamental grill gates and fencing, is of striking beauty. The entrance road leads to the greystone Superintendent's Office and Visitors' Building. Directly in front of the building is the visitors' parking area. To the right of these, enclosed by a low stone wall, are the graves area and the memorial. A short bituminous roadway, bordered by linden trees on a carpet of grass, leads from the Visitors' Building to the ornate bronze gates through which the visitor enters the graves area. This area, which is divided into four plots, A through D, is generally rectangular in shape. The graveled paths intersect the graves area at the flagpole, which flies an American flag. Mounted on the base of the flagpole are four bronze World War I trench helmets capping bronze wreaths. The bronze ornamental items were executed by Marcel Loyau of Boulogne, France and were cast by the H. Rouard Foundries of Paris, France.

Located in the rear of the graves area in Plots C and D are two pillars containing a carillon presented and dedicated on 2 June 1996 by the Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation. The carillon will play the national anthems of the United States and France, Taps, as well as other hymns.

THE MEMORIAL CHAPEL

At the southeastern end of the cemetery stands a small memorial Chapel of white Vaurion stone.

The chapel rests on a slightly raised square podium and is enclosed by a stone-faced wall. Resting on the lintel of the entrance doors is a sculptured bronze eagle with wings spread. Above the doors is inscribed the following:

TO THOSE WHO DIED FOR THEIR COUNTRY

to remind the visitor that those buried there, died for their freedom. Flanking the inscription are sculpted on the exterior facade at one end of the Memorial Chapel is a World War I era tank and on the opposite facade is an artillery piece. Beneath these are arched windows providing light for the interior of the Chapel. The rear facade of the Chapel is embellished by a crystal window in the form of a cross. Above the window, flanked by sculpted artillery shells, is the inscription:

MORTS POUR LA PATRIE
(They Died for Their Country)

Two stylized sculpture eagles flank the name of the cemetery.

CHAPEL INTERIOR

The Chapel is entered from the stepped terrace through bronze double doors studded with forty-eight bronze stars representing the then forty-eight states. Inside the chapel, one's attention is drawn to the altar of Balacet marble. Across the face of the altar is inscribed:

THOU O LORD HAS GRANTED THEM ETERNAL REST



View of Chapel through Entrance Door

Immediately below the inscription are the letters: IHS. Four bronze candelabra sit on the altar. Behind the candles, inlaid in the Vaurion stone, is an hourglass motif embellished by a bronze screen pattern. In the center, embossed in bronze, is a grapevine wreath which encircles the ancient Greek religious symbol for the “anointed one.” At the altar base rests the Table of Moses. Inset in the Haurteville marble floor, within a circular bronze plaque, is a large embossed star surrounded by forty-eight smaller stars.

The names of 333 American soldiers missing in the area whose remains were never recovered, or, if recovered were never identified, are inscribed upon the sidewalls. The following inscription precedes the names on the north wall:

THE NAMES RECORDED ON THESE WALLS
ARE THOSE OF AMERICAN SOLDIERS
WHO FOUGHT IN THIS REGION
WHO SLEEP IN UNKNOWN GRAVES.

On the opposite walls, below the flagstaffs, additional names of those Missing in Action in the region are inscribed. Also inscribed is the following:

THIS CHAPEL WAS ERECTED BY
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF HER SONS
WHO DIED DURING THE WORLD WAR.

Three windows illuminate the chapel’s interior, one in the form of a cross high above the altar. To the left and right of the altar are beautifully arched stained glass windows containing the insignia of the major units which participated in World War I.

GRAVES AREA

The graves area consists of four rectangular plots. The gravesites are all marked with marble headstones set in stately rows on a carpet of grass. Stars of David mark the graves of those of the Jewish faith and Latin Crosses mark all others. Of the 1,844 burials in the cemetery, 138 are Unknown. The remains of three Medal of Honor recipients are among those resting at the cemetery. Each grave plot is bordered by trees and plants. Those interred in the cemetery came from all of the then forty-eight states (except Vermont and Wyoming) and the District of Columbia.



Memorial Chapel and Graves Area from the Rear of Cemetery



Visitors' Building

VISITORS' BUILDING

At the upper end of the entrance avenue are the Visitors' Building and parking area. Inside the building are the Superintendent's Office and a comfortably furnished room where visitors may rest and obtain information from the cemetery staff. The visitors' register is maintained there. Burial locations and sites of memorialization in all of the overseas American military cemeteries of both World War I and World War II, plus other information of interest concerning the American overseas cemeteries or local history, may be obtained from the Superintendent of the cemetery staff.



Visitors' Room

PLANTINGS

The lane leading from the entrance gate to the Visitors' Building is shaded by Linden trees. Plantings of colorful polyantha roses border the grave plots in the area surrounding the flagpole. The meadow areas are landscaped with massifs of multicolored shrubs such as lilac, ash, beech, cedar, elm, holly, ewe, spruce, sycamore and pines.

Bellicourt Monument

The Bellicourt Monument is located 118 miles/197 kilometers northeast of Paris; 9 miles/14.5 kilometers north of the town of St. Quentin (Aisne), France, on the highway to Cambrai and 1 mile/1.6 kilometers north of the village of Bellicourt and 3 miles/4.8 kilometers from the Somme American Cemetery. Erected above a canal tunnel built by Napoleon I, it commemorates the achievements and sacrifices of the 90,000 American troops who served in battle with the British Armies in France during 1917 and 1918.

The tunnel was one of the main defense features of the Hindenburg Line which was broken by American troops in a brilliant offensive in September 1918. A map illustrating the American operations is engraved on the west facade of the memorial. Next to the map is inscribed:

MAP SHOWING THE ATTACK OF
THE 2ND AMERICAN CORPS,
COMPOSED OF THE 27TH AND 30TH DIVISIONS,
WHICH RESULTED IN BREAKING
THE HINDENBURG LINE IN THIS VICINITY.

The inscription also appears in French. On the terrace, near the map, is an orientation table. The monument and maps were designed by Paul Cret of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



Bellicourt Monument

The monument is a large and impressive rectangular stone block set on a two-stepped terrace. It is ornamented on its east face by baarelief figures, of heroic size, representing Valor and Remembrance. In the center is a symbolic American flag topped by an eagle. The figures were executed by L. Bottiau of Paris, France. Below the figures, on the base of the monument appears the inscription:

ERECTED BY THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
IN COMMEMORATION OF THE AMERICAN UNITS
WHICH SERVED WITH THE BRITISH ARMIES
IN FRANCE DURING THE WORLD WAR.

On the north side of the monument is inscribed: 27TH DIVISION 80TH DIVISION 11TH ENGINEERS (the insignia of the 27th and 80th Divisions also appear). On the south side of the Memorial is inscribed: 30TH DIVISION 33RD DIVISION 6TH ENGINEERS (the insignia of the 30th and 33rd Divisions also appear).

Inscribed on the base of the monument on all four sides are the names of places in the region where important battles were fought by American troops: CHIPILLY RIDGE GRESSAIRE WOOD WARFUSEE-ABANCOURT MONTBREHAIN GOUZEAUCOURT ST. SOUPLET PUSSIEUZ AU MONT QUENNEEMONT FARM MAZINGHIEN BELLICOURT.

The monument was dedicated on 9 August 1937.

Cantigny Monument

The Cantigny Monument is located in the village of Cantigny (Somme), France, 4 miles/6.4 kilometers northwest of Montdidier on route D-26 from Montdidier to Ailly-sur-Noye. From Paris, it is 66 miles/101 kilometers north via Chantilly or Senlis.

This battlefield monument, commemorates the first offensive operation in May 1918 by a division size American unit in World War I.

The 28th Infantry of the American First Division, operating under the French X Corps, captured the town of Cantigny from German troops on 28 May 1918. In the subsequent two-day counterattack, launched by the Germans, which included a 72-hour bombardment from artillery guns of every caliber, the village was completely destroyed. However, the First Division lost no ground and the Germans were compelled to accept defeat. This victory provided the Allies with a concrete example of the fighting ability of the American troops, which were then beginning to arrive in France in large numbers.



Cantigny Monument

The monument consists of a white stone stele (column) on a slightly raised platform. It is surrounded by an attractive park developed and maintained by the American Battle Monuments Commission. The quiet surroundings now give no hint of the bitter hand-to-hand fighting which took place near the site of the monument.

On the face of the monument appears the inscription:

ERECTED BY THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
TO COMMEMORATE THE FIRST ATTACK
BY AN AMERICAN DIVISION IN THE WORLD WAR.

On the side of the memorial appears the inscription:

THE FIRST DIVISION UNITED STATES ARMY
OPERATING UNDER THE X FRENCH CORPS
CAPTURED THE TOWN OF CANTIGNY ON
MAY 28 1918 AND HELD IT AGAINST
NUMEROUS COUNTERATTACKS.

French translation of these inscriptions appear on opposite sides of the monument.

Architect for the monument was Arthur Loomis Harmon of New York, New York.
It was dedicated on 9 August 1937.